***Seize The Initiative* Pre-Production Grant Proposal**

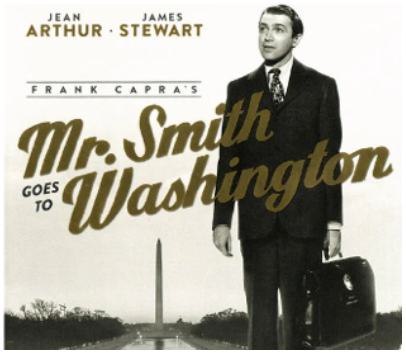
by Yoram Bauman

Seize The Initiative is the working title of a family-friendly romantic comedy about democracy, climate action, and sandwiches. **This grant will fund student engagement, environmental education, and pre-production work through March 2027** as we prepare to film the feature-length movie in 2027, release the film in 2028... and win Academy Awards in 2029!



"It's like *Clueless* (1995) crossed with *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939)."





Personal context and project history

My career has had four overlapping threads:

- **Environmental economics:** I have a PhD from the University of Washington and I currently teach in the business school at the U of U.
- **Stand-up comedy:** I made a living for over 10 years as "the world's first and only stand-up economist", with over a million hits for my routines about economics and politics.
- **Cartoon books:** I've co-authored (with the illustrator Grady Klein) four cartoon books about climate change, calculus, and micro- and macro-economics.
- **Climate activism:** I've volunteered on revenue-neutral carbon tax ballot measure efforts in Washington State (as the founder and co-chair of the I-732 campaign in 2016) and in Utah with Clean The Darn Air, a campaign to replace Utah's state sales tax on grocery store food with a modest carbon tax on fossil fuels. That campaign is now mothballed, but in past attempts to qualify for the ballot we've gathered about 50,000 signatures.

In spring 2023, a brainstorming session with Clean The Darn Air colleagues (two Hinckley Institute interns and U of U biology professor Dave Carrier, with Dave and myself both involved as private citizens) led to the idea of making a YouTube video about how to do volunteer signature-gathering. I offered to draft a script... and then I tried to make it entertaining by including real-life "tales from the trails"... and it turned into a romantic comedy! (A charming young man from the Washington State campaign was the inspiration for the main plot line.)

In July 2024, a stage-play version of *Seize The Initiative* premiered at the Great Salt Lake Fringe Festival with six sold-out shows. My joke is that I only lost half my shirt on the stage play, so I decided to bet the other half on a movie project: in spring 2026, I finished a screenplay adaptation while taking a screenwriting class at the U as a registered undergraduate.

In September 2026, we filmed an 8-minute movie short, directed by Film department alum Jeremy Mathews. Filming mostly took place on and near campus—all necessary permits were acquired—and **many U of U students participated as cast and crew members**: we hired Doug Sands, Sienna Smith, and Destiny Moreno as Assistant Directors and Giada Pennino and Charlotte Barnett Shirley to do Hair & Make-Up, and two dozen students volunteered to be extras. (Doug and Sienna also participated as actors during a table read of the full script.)

The short is still being edited (upon request, we can send a rough cut!), but this photo of two of the main actors is just one of the great stills at https://standupeconomist.com/stills1/. (Except as noted, all the photos in this document are by Fine Arts alum Brian Gee.)



Our budget for the short was $12,000, funded primarily out-of-pocket and with generous donations of time and money from cast, crew, and other supporters of the project. (The director and two lead crew members, who collectively have **40 years of experience** in the film industry, asked for their salaries to be re-allocated to bring in others and advance the project.)

All in all, it was an incredible experience, and it made us excited about filming the feature!

The plot

SAUL puts the "action" into climate action, flirting with young women and roping them into volunteering for a carbon tax ballot measure campaign in Utah… but then he falls for GRACE.

It's a classic "boy meets girl, boy loses girl" story arc, but **three things make it special**.

First, the political context. The meet-cute happens while Saul is wearing a campaign sandwich board and gathering signatures. He flirts with Grace ("Your handwriting is *beautiful*"), she flirts back ("I *would* like to see what you look like *without* a sandwich board on"), and he sweet-talks her into joining the campaign: "Don't take this the wrong way, but *I'd* like to see what *you* look like *with* a sandwich board on; wanna help?" Their romance intertwines with the campaign, and **both the romance and the campaign reflect the movie's theme of commitment**: to another person in a relationship, and to thousands if not millions of other people in a democracy. That theme is extended with the supporting characters (Nikki's on-off romance with Samantha; Lance's commitment to the hapless Seattle Mariners), with Grace's open-mic political comedy routine at Wiseguys, and with Grace's research on the funniest ballot measures in U.S. history.





Second, **this movie is a love letter to Salt Lake City and Utah.** Yes, we have problems—including the inversion, which is the local impetus for the campaign—but we live in a place of amazing natural beauty that is also full of great culture and fascinating people. The movie showcases all this, including with a fun scene (see the "*Cameos*" proposal below) that could include Utah celebrities: authors Terry Tempest Williams and Tracy Hickman; singer Post Malone; actors Katherine Heigl, Ty Burrell, and Tan France; the U of U and BYU football coaches; Emily Belle Freeman and other prominent Latter-day Saints; current and former political leaders; the Miller, Garff, Eccles, and Ryan Smith families; athletes John Stockton, Karl Malone, Nathen Chen, and Steve Young; Ken Jennings from *Jeopardy*; model Chrissy Teigen; Wizard Ten (the "Salt Lake City wizard"); etc.

Third, the music...

The music

Music is key in movies, especially romantic comedies, and our dream soundtrack is incredible. **It's mostly songs about sandwiches.** That's because the meet-cute happens while Saul is wearing a campaign sandwich board, so when Grace offers him a ticket to the concert and her best friend Nikki is skeptical ("Wait, you're inviting *Jimmy John* to join us?"), it sets up a recurring joke about sandwiches... and then the audience gradually figures out that most of the soundtrack is *themed*:

- "Classic Hoagie" (by Utah ska band Stretsch Armstronng, 1994)
- "Wawa Hoagies [Family Edit]" (Aaron Out, 2017)
- "Don't Put Onions on Your Hamburger" (The Dellwoods, 1963)
- "Sandwiches" (Detroit Grand Pubahs, 2000)
- "Sandwich Man" (Paolo Conte, 2004)
- "You're Not My Favourite Sandwich" (Elsa Birgitta Bekman, 2019)
- "Cheeseburger in Paradise" (Jimmy Buffett, 1978)
- "Free Fallin'" (Tom Petty, 1989)
- "Sandwiches Are Beautiful" (Bob King, 1980)
- "The Hamburger Song" (Bobby Moore and the Rhythm Aces, 1966)

As Grace puts it, midway through the movie: "You wouldn't believe how many songs there are about sandwiches."

We are working on negotiating rights for these songs (see "*Music rights detective work*" below), focusing on "step deals" that feature a relatively modest payment up-front for film festival / educational / public performance rights and then a steeper payment if and when the film has a theatrical release. As detailed below (see "*Sandwich song music contest*"), we would also love to commission some original music!

The plan going forward

We aim to film the feature during the second half of 2027, edit it during the first half of 2028, and release the feature during the second half of 2028. We would like to film much of the feature at or near the U and are currently applying for some of the necessary permits.

A "minimum viable product" approach to filming the feature suggests that it will take a minimum of 20 days and a minimum budget of $500,000. On the plus side, the State of Utah has Film Incentive Programs that offer a 20-25% rebate on "Utah spend" provided that, e.g., 85% of the cast and crew are Utah residents.

This plan is definitely *not impossible*—I was the primary fundraiser for the I-732 campaign in Washington State, which ended up raising over $750,000—but it is *speculative*. Because of this, **our EGG Funding request covers many activities that provide value in and of themselves, in addition to helping with pre-production work for the film.**

EGG funding requested ($30,000)

Note that I teach summer and fall semesters, but not in the spring, so during and after winter break I can spend a good chunk of time helping to guide these projects.

$500: Environmental sustainability on the set. Hire a student to research and present on green practices in the film industry, based for example on the Green Production Guide produced by the Sustainable Entertainment Alliance, Producers Guild of America Sustainability, and the Green Film School Alliance (GFSA). This student could also look to establish or expand connections between GFSA and the U Film program.

$500: Environmental review of the script. Hire a student to check with faculty and other experts at the U and beyond about the accuracy of content about climate change in the script. This student could also suggest script additions or changes based on the climate story-telling sections of the Green Production Guide.

$500: Historical review of the script. Hire a student to check the accuracy of content about ballot measures, Utah's own Martha Hughes Cannon, etc. This student could also try to find funny ballot measures that Grace's research may have missed!

$500: Add a scene at the Great Salt Lake, maybe with Audubon or The Nature Conservancy. There's a montage sequence near the end that shows Saul and Grace's relationship developing. (Spoiler alert: it comes before the wedding!) We could hire a student to add a short scene with bird-watching at the Great Salt Lake and maybe a volunteer at Audubon's Gillmor Sanctuary or TNC's Great Salt Lake Shorelands Preserve talking about the Pacific Flyway. This student could identify birds that are photogenic and have a good story (maybe with a rom-com angle?), work on timing (do the birds migrate and if so when?), and do location scouting / permitting. Bonus points for getting Audubon or TNC to consider investing in or promoting the film!







$500: Add a ski or snowboard scene, maybe with Protect Our Winters. As part of the montage sequence—or perhaps elsewhere in the film—there could be a snow scene, maybe with one or both of the romantic leads doing tricks or something else cool and then rolling around and kissing in the snow. We could hire a student who is into winter sports to explore what this scene could look like, what kind of permits we would need and might be able to get from ski areas, how easy it would be to get stunt doubles and how that part of filming works, whether there are students at the U who could serve as stunt doubles, whether we could include a visual nod to the 2034 Olympics, etc. This student could also connect with climate groups like Protect Our Winters; bonus points for getting them to consider investing in or promoting the film!

$500: Plan spring 2027 and fall 2027 filming road trips to southern Utah. As part of the montage sequence, it would be great to have short scenes of the romantic leads and maybe some of the supporting cast at Arches, The Wave, Zion, Snow Canyon, and other Utah outdoor highlights. We could hire a student to help plan a road trip for a subset of the cast and crew. (Some locations, like The Wave, require winning a 4-months-in-advance lottery.) A 6-day trip around spring break—March 6-14, 2027—would be *wonderful* because it could double as a bonding opportunity and allow the cast to rehearse the script and suggest edits prior to main filming; to execute this trip, however, we would look elsewhere for additional funding (perhaps $20,000, including paying cast and crew). A trip in the fall of 2027 could potentially include a night at Phantom Ranch, at the bottom of the Grand Canyon—close enough to southern Utah!—because we won the 14-month-ahead lottery for a 10-person cabin on Nov 1, 2027.

$500: Location scouting and permitting for farmers markets, TRAX, etc. Hire a student to work on the two scenes set at the downtown SLC farmers market, including whether we can film there (permitting, logistics, etc.) and whether there are better alternatives, e.g., does the U still have tents and other materials for the campus farmers market that existed until recently, and would it be worthwhile to explore using those to create a "fake" farmers market scene? (One advantage of doing this would be that we would have more control over noise, foot traffic, etc.) This student could also do other location scouting and permitting work, including connecting with UTA about the scenes that take place on a TRAX train and a UTA bus.





$500: Cameos / Easter eggs from Utah celebrities. There's a scene with a crowd on Red Butte Canyon Road, waiting for the gates to open for a concert, and it would be fun to have famous Utahns being "regular folks in line." Hire a student to identify them and plan outreach!

$500: Copies of *The Cartoon Introduction to Climate Change*. I co-authored this book and can get copies at an 80% discount, about $6 each, as thank-you gifts for students and others.

$500: Casting minor roles, vehicles, etc. Hire an outgoing student to look on- and off-campus for folks to play the many minor roles in the film: Hippie Girl, Rational Skeptic, etc. This student could also look for specific vehicles we need for the film, e.g., an open-top Jeep.

$500: Safety on the set and lessons from #MeToo. Hire a student to research and present best practices for keeping everyone safe on the set.

$3,000: Small-group discussions about the full script, with title and Kickstarter brainstorms. Host six 2-hour small-group conversations about the full script with screenwriting students and others *who have read the script in advance*, with good food, cartoon books, and/or gift cards as thank-you gifts, plus the potential for students to be listed in the credits if they contribute to the script! These groups could also brainstorm ideas for the movie title and for fun rewards to offer for donations on crowdfunding platforms like Kickstarter or Seed & Spark.

$500: Music rights detective work. Some songs in our dream soundtrack are old and/or fairly obscure, so it's been hard to figure out who own the rights we need. (No, AI isn't much help.) Offer gift cards or other rewards for students whose detective skills uncover the truth!

$1,000: Sandwich song music contest. Hire a student to run a contest for original music, with gift cards for prizes and the winning song(s) being considered for inclusion in the movie!

$2,000: Focus groups on the short. Hire the Anthropology Department's Applied Ethnography Unit (AEU) to organize focus groups where students or others could watch the short and provide feedback on the story, the actors, and the video. (See *Collaboration* attachment.)





$1,000: QAMO 2010 film festival. One of my QAMO 2010 students was involved in an award-winning short film about skateboarding, and another student did a ski film. We could screen these films (and our short), with a Q&A afterwards, plus free food. We might also be able to work with AEU to get feedback with iClickers (an instant-response app used in QAMO 2010).

$2,000: Stage reading of the feature script. Hire Film or Theater students to do a stage reading of the feature script, with a moderated talkback session and/or an AEU focus group afterwards.

$15,000: Work by experienced professionals on our team, with the overall goal of making a Go / No Go decision on fall 2027 filming by April 2027:

- *Detailed shot lists*, led by Film alum Jeremy Mathews and starting with the wedding scene because of the long lead-time needed for planning and because the budget for the feature will depend on whether we need one day or two days to film this scene.
- *Day-by-day film schedule,* accounting for weather and other eventualities.
- *Budgeting,* including funding for cast and crew, SAG-AFTRA / DGA union minimums, etc.
- *Fundraising,* including crowdfunding, pitch decks, grants, and possible equity funding.
- *Social media, website, props, and other graphic design,* led by Fine Arts alum Brian Gee.

Much of this work could be done by **U of U alums** who could give **talks on campus** about their process and who would be happy to consider **hiring students to help** with this work.



Photo credit: Tania Maldonado (QAMO 2010 student)

Deliverables by the end of March 2027

- Students will complete research, write-ups, and presentations on **environmental sustainability on the set** (including possible connections between the U and the Green Film School Alliance) and on **safety on the set / lessons from #MeToo**.
- Students will complete **environmental and historical reviews of the script**, will write up brief scenes about the **Great Salt Lake** and a **ski venue**, and will **scout locations** and learn about permitting issues for scenes at a farmers market, on TRAX trains, etc.
- Students will **plan filming road trips** to southern Utah for spring 2027 and fall 2027.
- Students will **scout talent** on-campus and off-campus and will **identify Utah celebrities like Terry Tempest Williams** for cameos and suggest strategies for reaching out to them.
- Students will complete a **contest for original music** and will (hopefully!) have won the prizes for tracking down **obscure music rights**.
- Students will participate in a **QAMO 2010 film festival**, **focus groups**, and **small-group discussions** about the full script; acting students will do a **stage reading and talkback**.
- *Cartoon Climate* books will be distributed as thank-you gifts.
- Alums and other professionals will work on shot lists, scheduling, budgeting, fundraising, and other tasks needed to **make a Go / No Go decision on fall 2027 filming by April 2027**.

We can't promise that we will be able to Go and move forward with this movie. (We almost had a disaster with the short: the day before we filmed, there was a torrential downpour!) *But we can promise that we will try our best, and that U students will learn a lot along the way.* And we have as a model a successful project that our Director of Photography (Bryan Stewart) was part of at UVU: "Key roles were filled by experienced industry professionals, but the crew beneath them was staffed primarily with students, who got to work on an actual feature under the guidance of working professionals rather than simply being turned loose to make a student film. **The combination of a lean professional crew, meaningful student involvement, and a lot of thoughtful pre-production could work very well for *Seize The Initiative!***"



